

St. Wenceslas, 929-1929

POPE PIUS XI

*Apostolic Letter of His Holiness on the Thousandth Anniversary of
St. Wenceslas, King and Martyr of the Czechs. Trans-
lation by the Rev. T. J. Vopatek, reprinted
from the "Witness," Dubuque, Iowa*

TO THE VENERABLE BRETHREN ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOP
OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA.

TO THE VENERABLE BRETHREN ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS
DICTION:

THE love and care of a true father shows itself surely by participation in the affairs of his children, be they happy or sad, according to the words of the Apostle, "to rejoice with them that rejoice and to weep with them that weep." Though We never ceased keeping you in mind and caring for the good of your people in the day of their well-being and in the days of their adversities, yet a rare and special occasion offers itself at present to rejoice with you in the Lord and to congratulate you and all your people. You are preparing to celebrate the sacred memory of that day, when a thousand years ago, St. Wenceslas, the famous ruler of the Czechs, your powerful protector, slain by the wicked hand of his brother, died a martyr's death at Stara Boleslav, a town famous in olden times, but now doubly renowned by its veneration of the miraculous Virgin, the Mother of God, and by the martyrdom of St. Wenceslas. We wish to enhance the splendor and joy of your celebration by this letter; and in the first place We approve your worthy intention to commemorate with all possible solemnity a man who had proved himself a great ornament and support of your nation and of the Catholic Church.

Ever since he was committed by his parents to the care of his devout grandmother Ludmila to be educated and trained in the precepts of our holy Faith, St. Wenceslas began to excel in Christian virtue from his early childhood. In order to learn the Latin language he was later sent to Budec, near Prague, where "there was a church dedicated

to the Prince of the Apostles, St. Peter." On being chosen to succeed to the throne of his father, though barely of age, from the very start he declared that he desired "to serve God alone in sincerity of his heart." With fearless courage he restored order in government, he stopped dissension and brought about the administration of justice. Devoted as he was, heart and soul, to the good of his country, he defended it against its enemies and was ever on the alert to keep it united and to make it prosperous. At the same time he was a mild ruler; "he ever endeavored to obtain peace without the ruin of others, without shedding the blood of innocent men, but through peaceful means and methods. Hence he ruled his people more by kindness than by command." In public he acted the sovereign, but at home, privately, he lived as austere as a monk, wearing a hair shirt under his costly garments, and he was "ever solicitous to keep his heart pure and spotless." His devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament was most remarkable; as a boy, "nothing delighted him so much as attending the Holy Mass and serving the priest and even when he attained the rule, with his own hands he prepared the bread and wine necessary for the Sacrifice of the Mass."

HIS FIRM AND LIVING FAITH

Here We must also mention his beneficence and liberality, for which he was praised by all. "He was most compassionate to the poor, he solaced those in misery, brought joy to the poverty-stricken, he was the father of orphans, the defender of widows, with his own money he redeemed captives, he consoled anyone who had recourse to him in trouble." Who can doubt that all these splendid virtues of his had their source in his undaunted and living faith? He always kept the Catholic Faith, not merely in his heart, but fearlessly professed it in public and unrelaxingly he sought to defend it and to propagate it. Consequently, as soon as he assumed the reins of government, his first care was to repair the losses of religion by recalling the exiled clergy, by opening the abandoned churches to Divine service, by rebuilding the sacred edifices that had been destroyed and constructing new ones. The most famous of these latter was the church he built in Prague and dedicated to the holy martyr St. Vitus, which in later ages was raised to the

dignity of the cathedral and metropolitan seat, and which this very year of the millennium will be renovated and solemnly consecrated again. It was his greatest solicitude to make Christian morals flourish in his dominions. For this reason, though he was ever a most gentle ruler, he severely punished "those who sought to spread false principles or corrupt good morals." This zeal for virtue brought him the hatred and ill will of the wicked. His own brother, Boleslas, giving ear to their slanders and joining in their plots, assassinated St. Wenceslas, with the help of several partners in his horrible crime, as he was at the door of the church dedicated to Sts. Cosmas and Damian in Stara Boleslav, where the Saint had been invited to celebrate the annual feast of dedication and to a festive banquet. St. Wenceslas died praying, and conspicuous to the end for courage of soul and admirable forgiveness for his fratricidal murderer.

DEVOTION TO ST. WENCESLAS IN THE CZECH LAND AND IN OTHER COUNTRIES

We joyfully recount the noble deeds of your saintly patron, not that you may learn what you well know, but that it may be made more clear how rightly you pay him the highest honors, and how properly all the Faithful have always glorified the unconquerable martyr. You are well informed of the renown of the martyr-king immediately after his departure for heaven; not only in Stara Boleslav, which was ennobled by his holy blood, and in Prague whither his holy body was transferred after three years by order of his brother Boleslas himself, but in other regions beyond the confines of his native land. From all sides came requests for the relics of this servant of God, and in many places churches were erected in his honor. Passing these by, in Rome itself, since the fourteenth century an altar was dedicated to his honor in the very basilica of St. Peter, and upon the destruction of the old basilica, another marble altar was erected in its place in the new basilica, "notwithstanding that hardly any other holy king has an altar therein"; and the feast of St. Wenceslas was celebrated there annually in the presence of all the Cardinals. The frequent miracles and many graces which are commemorated by Czech writers contributed not a little to the spread of the cult of the holy

King. The name of Wenceslas, whom the Roman Pontiff, John XIII, adorned with the title of saint as early as the tenth century, was inscribed in the Sacramentary of that time and in many breviaries composed in the old Slavonic language. From the twelfth century on it also appears in the Latin breviaries, and the feast was celebrated in different places. This feast, Clement X of blessed memory, Our predecessor, extended to the whole Church in the year 1670, and Benedict XIII raised it to a higher rank in the year 1729.

THE GLORY OF ST. WENCESLAS IS FOUNDED ON HIS HOLY LIFE

Since the martyr-king was honored so long and in so many places, it is no wonder that your nation always had a special devotion to him, and it may be truly said that the name of no other man of your race is so deeply enshrined in the minds of the Czechs or venerated so much among you as that of the great Wenceslas. Who is there that does not know that the privileges and right of sacred sanctuary was given to his sepulcher, and that his sacred image was held in honor in the homes, and also engraved on coins and public seals and reverently pictured on banners? His lance was carried into battle; the dignity and title of knight was conferred by a stroke of his sword; innumerable writers and thousands of memorials of every class of art have proclaimed his glory. St. Wenceslas was always considered by all of you as a most excellent model and as your most powerful protector. Hence you are accustomed to ask his help in all your anxieties, in war, in misfortune, especially begging his assistance by the ancient hymn "that he would not let you perish nor your children." Moreover, all your life was so intimately entwined with the person and homage of St. Wenceslas, that whatever was dear and precious to you was called by you the heritage of St. Wenceslas.

First of all, your ancestral religion, your language, your culture, your king's crown, your entire land. You call him truly the Heir or Owner of your country, as though, namely, your most holy King, enjoying the bliss of heaven, not only sends you ready help, but is still really the sovereign of your fatherland which he once endowed with so many benefits. For Wenceslas was not only the defender of the Cath-

olic Faith, but also the father of the Czech land, since he refined its civilization, preserved it safe from its enemies and brought it to greater unity and prosperity. For this reason your martyr-king is held in esteem by the governors and people of your State, and this millennial anniversary is justly observed even by those of your fellow-citizens who are not of the Catholic Faith.

Still we must hold that the glory of Wenceslas is all due to his holy life; and for this and not for political reasons as some rashly opine, was he put to death. It cannot be called into question by any reliable historian that wicked men slew this great and noble man because they greatly hated his saintly life, which they considered more befitting a monk than a king. They slew him because they bore him ill will on account of his exalted virtues, especially his charity, his chastity, his gentleness. His ardent zeal in propagating the religion of Christ and his severity in extirpating vice aroused their resentment; for they were unwilling to renounce their wicked heathen habits and they desired to persist in the paganism of their forefathers. Wenceslas was therefore a martyr of God in the truest sense of the word, namely a witness for the Christian Faith, who in the words of Aquinas, "by his acts places little value on the things of this life that he may obtain the future, unseen goods."

The most renowned men of your nation, with the universal Church, honored your Saint as a holy martyr. For instance, St. Adalbert, Bishop of Prague, who was later martyred in Prussia; he not only was "a native of the same land," but also an eminent client of his. Blessed Agnes, who, before she entered religion, daily venerated the relics of the Saint in Prague. Your illustrious King and Emperor, Charles IV, being specially devout to St. Wenceslas, had him for his particular protector and helper; and adorned the shrine of the Saint with precious gems, ornamented the sepulcher, ordered his skull to be encased in gold, and wrote the life of his predecessor upon the throne. Ernest of Pardubice, the first Archbishop of the See of Prague, by whose counsel the chapel of the Saint was enriched with a new and wonderful crown; lastly We mention St. John Nepomucene, the intrepid martyr of priestly duty, who according to tradition, made a pilgrimage to Stara Boleslav before his most cruel death.

Although all the citizens of your Republic, whatever

their religion or race may be, commemorate with good cause the memory of your glorious Ruler inasfar as he was a national hero of your country and its great benefactor, yet it is above all the duty of all Catholics, no matter in what country they live, to observe this jubilee. For this Saint is a martyr of the Catholic Church, which is the Mother of all the nations of the world. It is our firm hope that, commemorating this feast, all will unite their efforts to bring about as its result, a strengthening of the Faith, a more flourishing Christian life, and that the entire Church may blossom anew under the auspices and protection of St. Wenceslas.

ON RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

We rejoice that the condition of the Catholic Church in your land which our predecessor Benedict XV deplored in his letter to the Archbishop of Prague, dated January 3, 1920, is daily changing for the better. We are not ignorant that there are many priests among you who labor diligently in the Lord's vineyard. We know that many Eucharistic Congresses have been held in your country, attended by vast throngs of your clergy and laity. We are well informed that the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are held for all classes of men in various places. It has also been brought to Our attention that many of you, filled with apostolic zeal, are seeking to build new church edifices in the large cities and thus provide for the welfare of souls in these perilous times. Not a little help to accomplish this end comes from those sedulous men who stand up for the rights of the Catholic Church in public life and from those who foster friendly relations between the Holy See and your Republic.

There are then many reasons why We should be grateful to God. Nevertheless, you yourselves know well, that much is necessary to restore the Catholic religion among you to its former splendor. For with Us you sorrow over the want of laborers in the Lord's vineyard, especially in these times when so many priests are absolutely needed, priests full of the spirit of the Gospel and highly trained in the sacred sciences. All must therefore endeavor to induce worthy young men to study for the priesthood.

This, of course, cannot be secured unless youth receives

a true Christian education in their homes and in the schools. Wherefore, venerable brethren, do not cease to remind Catholic parents of the most grave obligation they have to give their children a Christian education, and to demand the right given by nature itself to establish Catholic schools or to insist with all possible effort that the faith of their children be not endangered in the public schools, but on the contrary that their minds may be trained in Christian habits.

Here We draw to your attention how wonderfully the frequent reception of the Bread of Angels attracts young men to the sacred ministry. For this reason We ask you to establish such societies as promote the frequent use of the most holy Eucharist, such as the Sodalities of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Particularly should members be secured among young men for the association commonly called the Knights of St. Wenceslas, who pledge themselves to follow the example of their patron and to receive Holy Communion often each month. It is of gravest importance that the young men destined for the priesthood should be properly prepared in seminaries, and that strict observance be given to the norms laid down by the Sacred Congregation in charge of studies and universities. Here We also commend to all good men the Collegium Nepomucenum which We have established in Our city and whose new quarters We hope, God willing, to dedicate in the near future. We wish also to remind you how greatly the Seminary of St. Wenceslas, founded in Prague in the year 1559 by the Society of Jesus, helped to assist the growth of religion among you. We have already expressed Our sincere thanks to the heads of your Government, to the clergy and people, for the material assistance which they have given for this purpose, and We pray God most earnestly to reward each and all the donors with an abundance of His gifts.

A PLEA FOR VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD AND FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOLS

A clergy so increased in numbers and virtue, will not only seek to strengthen the Faith among you, but also burning with apostolic zeal and following in the footsteps of Sts. Methodius and Adalbert will bend all its efforts also to bring back to the longed-for unity of the Mother Church

the separated Slavs of neighboring countries. We know that you have already labored much for this end, both by opportune congresses, and through the membership of the Apostolate of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, the Velehrad Institute of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and the seminary at Nitra for the education of missionaries. Do not, then, desist from urging this salutary work. In order that it may be done successfully, the Catholic religion must flourish among you. Those who are separated from Us must see and recognize among you those most certain signs which point out the true Church of Christ, namely a wonderful unity, a zeal for spreading the Catholic Faith everywhere, a remarkable holiness, and a most close union with the Apostolic See.

From all this We may conclude that this solemn commemoration of the martyrdom of St. Wenceslas will be rich in results if all your people strive to imitate the example of your patron. The deeds of St. Wenceslaus were such that all can usefully take lessons from them, each one according to his condition of life. Those who rule may learn from your most just King how to administer justice without fear yet with mercy. They can see that Catholic religion does not hinder public prosperity but rather promotes and strengthens all human society by its moral code. Your citizens may learn true charity from your most charitable Prince; putting aside all discord and rancor let them work together for the common good. From the truly Christian education which he received under the supervision of his grandmother Saint Ludmila, one may discover that power is innate in Christian teaching for leading youth safely on the way to salvation. For priests he is a model of ardent devotion to the most Blessed Sacrament, for youth of preserving purity unsullied, for the rich a pattern of aiding all manner of needy men. From him who did not hesitate to shed his life blood for Christ, and who attested his allegiance to the Chair of Peter by so many proofs, all may learn how to restrain their passions and how to bear pain with Christian fortitude, and finally to be second to none in love and loyalty to the Apostolic See.

May your country be united and strengthened as one great family in the Faith you inherited from St. Wenceslas. For under his patronage and protection, through the harmonious cooperation of both its religious and civil au-

thorities it will attain again its ancient glory and prosperity.

May the Apostolic blessing which We most cordially impart to you, venerable brethren, and to the entire flock entrusted to the care of each one of you, be the forerunner of heavenly gifts and the proof of Our paternal affection.

Dated at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the fourth day of March, in the year 1929, in the eighth year of Our Pontificate.

PIUS PP. XI

How Do the Sacraments Work?

H. B. LOUGHNAN, S.J.

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A GIRL who had been educated in a convent, but who had lost the gift of faith, once remarked, "Baptism is merely a piece of magic. Just as the blacks of Australia have their religious rites and ceremonies, so has the Catholic Church. In each case they are unable to effect anything real, they are merely pieces of magic. How can pouring a spoonful of water over a baby's head, make the child go straight to heaven, if it dies at once? It was not even conscious of what was being done. And how can marriage be a Sacrament, when it was in existence from the beginning of the human race? It's a contract, no matter where or before whom it is made. Yet we are expected to believe that something mysterious and hidden happens when two Catholics make this contract before a priest and two witnesses. It's all very unreasonable."

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN DOCTRINE AND ITS EXPLANATION

The Church doctrine on the Sacraments is briefly this: They are certain outward signs, either words, or actions, or both; they were instituted by Christ, either mediately or immediately (a theological distinction which we need not discuss here): they really cause grace. (At this point we take for granted the knowledge that grace is a real principle of life, just as real and mysterious a thing as is the vital principle that keeps a rose tree alive and enables it to produce

flowers. The "state of grace" does not merely mean that God loves one who is in that state: nor does it mean that something clothes us like a coat. Instead, it is a real life, capable of being destroyed and capable of increase; and through its "virtues" or faculties, it acts in some such manner as does the soul through the powers of memory and intellect and will.)

The point to explain is, "How do the Sacraments really cause grace?" For they are not merely the conditions under which it is given. Now, in their explanation of this question, theologians give two very different answers. And of these I shall outline here the one that is more commonly accepted and which is quite easily understood.

AN ILLUSTRATION

Let us suppose that a man called Timothy Brown is just recovering from a critical attack of double pneumonia, and that at this juncture a chill would bring about a fatal relapse. For the first time he is now allowed out for a walk accompanied by his nurse, and is taking a stroll in the afternoon sun by the weir of the Torrens. There is a splash and a cry, for a baby has fallen into the river. Without a moment's hesitation, and paying no attention to the warning of his nurse, Brown flings off his coat and jumps into the water and rescues the child. The inevitable occurs; he has a serious relapse and for weeks his life hangs in the balance; but in the end he pulls through and recovers.

Now the child's father is a millionaire and is anxious to show his gratitude to Mr. Brown for the rescue and for the risk of life so selflessly run. The monetary reward suggested by the father, he refuses, but at last is prevailed upon to accept an old family ring. This has seven seals, each of which can be impressed on wax. The child's father promises that if any of Brown's family present any petition stamped with one of these seals, the request will be regarded as that of Brown himself and will be at once, and without question, granted. For example, if political influence is needed, the petition for it will be stamped with the first seal of the ring; if money is wanted, then the second seal will be used; and so for the other five stamps, each is to be used for a special purpose. This agreement is inserted in the will made by the child's father.

After Brown's death his grandson needs money. He writes his request and stamps in wax the impression of the second seal, and presents the document at the office of the executor of the will. The stamp is verified. The request is regarded as that of Brown, who rescued the child, and because of his merits the petition is at once granted.

ITS APPLICATION

Now apply the story and see how it fits the facts; you will then be able easily to explain how the Sacraments really cause grace, and how there is the widest difference between them and magic. Jesus Christ did not merely risk His life; He freely gave it to save us. In consequence of His merits by so doing, He was as man, allowed by God the Father, to fix upon seven signs, and to entrust these to His family, the Church. Whenever one of these is presented before God in heaven, it is regarded as a request made by Christ Himself and is at once granted. Now, insofar as the sign moves God to grant the desired grace, it can be truly said to be the cause of grace. Hence, we have an easy explanation of the catechism's definition, "A Sacrament is a visible sign instituted by Christ to give grace."

HOW IS MARRIAGE A SACRAMENT?

In the opening paragraph we mentioned the Sacrament of marriage. Where is the special sign here? The answer is that in this particular case, Christ did not institute a new sign; instead, He decided that in the case of baptized people, the mere making of the marriage contract would itself be the sign or Sacrament. Hence, it may be recalled in passing, that strictly speaking, the priest does not marry the couple that come before him; for it is they, and not he, that make the contract. The priest is merely the witness whose presence is required in order that the contract may be valid. (The same thing applies in many civil contracts. The parties concerned cannot make a valid one, unless it is witnessed by some person appointed by the State.)

Here it may be useful to note still once again, for it has very often been brought to the notice of non-Catholics, that the Church has every right to make her marriage laws and to lay down the conditions under which the contract must

be entered into, if it is to have any binding force. Why? Because, as has been explained, the contract is itself a Sacrament, and because this is so, it is in the keeping of the Church; therefore, at least where her own children are concerned, she has the right to say when and how the contract may be made.

EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENTS

An interesting question here crops up. There is only one kind of sanctifying grace; why then are there seven Sacraments? When treating this matter, theologians give two different answers; here I shall set out the one more commonly received. It is as follows:

All the Sacraments have this in common, that they confer one and the same sanctifying grace; but they differ in what they give over and above this grace. Thus three of them, Baptism, Confirmation and Orders imprint on the soul an indelible mark or character (in the explanation of which there is a very considerable amount of discussion amongst the different schools of thought). But apart from this "character" which is given by these three, each Sacrament confers not only sanctifying grace, but also special actual graces or claim to such when the need of them arises. It will be interesting to note how this applies to some of the Sacraments in particular.

THE GRACE PECULIAR TO THE BLESSED EUCHARIST

For instance, Holy Communion brings with it the special actual grace of an increased familiarity with Jesus Christ; and from this there results a greater love of purity and an increased ease in prayer; the creature is taught to treat its Creator as a personal friend and yearns for Him as does a lover for an absent loved one. Further, in those families where the members are frequently at the altar rails, the home circle is invariably one of peace; and conversely, where bickering and unkindness and unpleasantness is the order of the day, you will, without exception find that at least one member of the family is absent when the rest are united to their common Lover, who wills them to be one with each other as they are one with Him.

THE GRACE PECULIAR TO PENANCE

The Sacrament of Penance does more than merely forgive sin. It deepens one's contrition and makes it more lasting; it engenders a distaste for sin, and keeps a person farther from it than before. This is why many people go to Confession even when they have no mortal sin to confess; they are looking for a continuance of that special help which they have already experienced, and for a deeper appreciation of purity of soul which makes sin more unlikely. "Wash me yet more," pleaded David. Thus with this special grace of the Sacrament, frequent confession enables many a one to break completely with habits whose links have been strongly forged by years of indulgence or carelessness.

THE GRACES PECULIAR TO EXTREME UNCTION

Of Extreme Unction there is little need to speak, for its special grace is obvious. Firstly, it is like confession in this, that it forgives sin even though the contrition is only motivated by fear instead of by perfect love of God. (Of course, there would remain the obligation of confessing serious sin, if an opportunity later arose.) Secondly, the effects of past sin are prevented from troubling the dying person; for suggestive imaginative pictures are kept in check. Helps almost visible and tangible are received at the last moments; often a space of clear consciousness which was quite unexpected enables the sick person to make his confession easily and well, and to receive lovingly and confidently the last embrace of Christ, before whom he is soon to be judged. Over and above all this, there is given a special assistance to recover, if it be good for the sick man. Thus it is no exaggeration to say that after Extreme Unction a person has a better chance of getting well than he had before receiving the Sacrament. In fact, not a few non-Catholic doctors are only too glad when the priest gives the Holy Oils to one of their patients, as these medical men have had experience of the results.

CONFIRMATION AND THE SEVEN GIFTS

Working out this idea of a claim to actual grace, there are some theologians who find an easy solution to the ques-

tion as to what precisely is given in Confirmation, when the recipient has conferred on him the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost. It could be held that these gifts consist in a special claim to the actual graces that are required during life, when one's faith is in any way endangered.

Francis of Assisi

JOSEPH F. WICKHAM, Ph.D.

A radio address delivered during the commemoration of the seventh centenary of St. Francis, by the author of "Assisi of St. Francis and Other Essays of Italy."

ON October 4 [1926], the world observed the seven hundredth anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi. He is a saint of the Catholic Church; he was the founder of the Franciscan Order; he is counted great among great men. He is now, indeed, everybody's saint and everybody's hero.

It seems so long ago now since Francis was on earth that it is difficult to visualize the world he lived in. Let us turn our historical glances backward for a moment. He was born in the year 1182. That was 300 years before Columbus set forth from Spain. It was one century after William of Normandy had conquered England. It was 400 years before Shakespeare was born. It was twenty years after the laying of the foundation stone of the great Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. It was 450 years before the founding of Harvard College. Oxford University was just growing up from small beginnings. The Crusades were calling the flower of chivalry to Palestine.

The world has changed since then. New worlds have been discovered. New cities have been built. Modern man is living in surroundings quite different from the medieval city that Francis knew. Still, if you go over to Assisi today, you will find it much as Francis knew it. The valley is there, and the hills of Monte Subasio, and the road to Perugia and to Rome. And everywhere you will find the dreaming spirit of mysticism that is more beautiful than the blue skies and the sunlight on the hill.

It is difficult in a few minutes to say anything adequate

about St. Francis. All of us know that. And we all know something about his life. The modern world has been accused of being materialistic, of being pleasure-mad, of being cynical. It pleads guilty to all these things, and to more. But it has its idealism, too, and its loving nature, and its sympathy for sincerity and simplicity. Perhaps there is no surer proof of this than its admiration for St. Francis of Assisi. Indeed this is as it should be. For Francis loved the whole world. He was the great lover. His lifetime was one supreme romance of loving. He loved the poor, the lowly; he loved the rich, the exalted. He loved the birds and the bees and the animals of the forest. In his great heart there was no room for hate; only love found there a local habitation and a name.

Let us review his youthful life for a moment to find the key to his great career. He was born in Assisi, Italy, in 1182, the son of a merchant, Pietro Bernardone. There was no great stir in the little town when his father, who had lately been in France, named the child Francesco. Why should there be? Other merchants also had sons, to grow up and find their place in life.

During his youthful years Francis apparently was like the other carefree young men of his city. He loved song, he spent money, he was a leader among his fellows. Still in his gayety there was always a sensitive refinement, always a choice reserve. In his nature there was always a fine idealism, a joyous undefined ambition to do great things; to win fame and to win it like a knight. For those were the days when knighthood was in flower. And Francis wished to win the flower of chivalry.

In the year 1202 Francis saw battle. Assisi was at strife with Perugia, a nearby city. Francis was taken prisoner. It is no pleasant thing for a young man of twenty years to be in captivity. But through it all he was lighthearted and uncomplaining. His fellow-prisoners wondered, but they did not understand him. He scarcely understood himself. But here in prison he was finding himself out. He was thinking of life, thinking of his own life; of fame and honor and place. His was an imprisonment which unlocked his dreams. And he came home the next year with his mind full of high resolve.

At home he fell sick. And in his long illness there came to him the first whisperings of another nobility, a chivalry

without lances, a knighthood without the gilded mail. But, when health came, the paths of glory beckoned to him again and he started for the battle line to serve with Walter de Brienne. One night he lay down to rest at Spoleto, the beautiful hill city to the south of Assisi. But before he slept he heard the voice of the Lord calling him to go back to Assisi and wait. So he went back. This was the end of the youth's earthly knighthood. The spurs of gold were not for him.

He took up his old life. He met his friends. He came to the banquet table. But there was a difference in him now. His soul was no longer in the song. There was no joy for him in fine raiment. His companions often noticed a thoughtful expression on his face.

"Art thou in love? Is the beautiful maid ever in thy thoughts?" they would say to him.

"Yes, I am in love, and I shall take a wife more beautiful and more noble than you have ever seen," he once made answer.

The bride was Lady Poverty. To poverty he would wed himself.

At first nobody understood him. His father did not, his friends did not. Perhaps the Lady Pica, his mother, did. But at any rate Francis knew what he was about. He knew that the greatest thing in the world is love. He knew that the finest object in the world to love was the God who created him. Gold and earthly honor could not satisfy a heart like that of Francis of Assisi. So he reduced life to a beautiful simplicity. He was the philosopher of poverty, that poverty which consists "in having nothing and in desiring nothing, yet in possessing all things in the spirit of liberty." Christ in His poverty was the great adventure, and with Francis it had more of splendor, more of glory, more of chivalry and song and romance than all the thousand battles that the troubadours of France had sung in his ears.

After a time the people of Assisi ceased to ridicule Francis. They saw that there was something really great about him. Their old laughter changed to reverence. And in a few weeks Francis was no longer the solitary hermit of the Porziuncola, begging the day's bread at the doors of his father's friends. Three others had joined him, a wealthy merchant, a doctor of law who had received his degree from the

University of Bologna, and a son of a farmer. Soon four more came, and there were eight in all.

Francis now wished to offer himself and his company to the Pope. So they started for Rome, singing in prayer as they went, for the followers of Francis were joyous of soul, never melancholy. Down the valley and over the hills they walked, a cheerful, valiant, wonderful brotherhood. In this fashion did they reach the Eternal City. After some thought, Innocent III approved the plans of Francis. The eight were joyful now, joyful as the troubadours of Provence, hopeful as the questing knights of Camelot. And they sought the pleasant pathways back to Assisi. These were the first pledged sons of the Friars Minor. Francis of Assisi had redeemed the ambitions of his youth.

I am sure all of you who are good enough to be listening to me know the details of the further life of St. Francis. He has won the interest of too many writers to allow any of us to plead ignorance of his life. We remember how the Order grew, how the work of preaching was carried everywhere, to Spain, to France, to England, to Germany, and Hungary. We remember the fascinating episode of Francis preaching at the camp of the Sultan at Damietta. We remember how Francis composed the *Cantic of the Sun*, thus taking his place as an Italian poet. We remember him at Alvernia, and the stigmata that came to him there. We remember how at last, his journeys over, his Order grown to immense numbers, his idealism perfect as in the days of his youth, he came back to Assisi to die.

Francis did not shrink from death. He had never shrunk from life. Life was to him a simple thing, a gift to be used in simple fashion, a glorious period of joy that should be a song to be sung, and never a lamentation. So it was with death. He looked upon death as his sister, a sister come to lead him into courts where he would be welcome. When you go to Assisi a Franciscan of today will show you the tiny cell in which St. Francis died. It is 700 years now since the great Assisian, everybody's saint, felt the earth's gladness and the sun's warmth for the last time. "Welcome, Sister Death!" he murmured, on that October day in 1226. Unnumbered thousands have stood before this little cell in which their saint died. And there probably has not been one of them but looked upon him as God's own gentle knight, a knight without fear and without reproach.

Why does the world love St. Francis? As I remarked a little while ago, one reason is, that he himself loved everybody and everything. Men he loved very dearly. The birds he treated with a tenderness sublime. He was gentle to the wolf, he worried that the bees of Assisi should suffer the cold of the winter time. A remarkable man, wasn't he? Now St. Francis would not have considered this love for his fellow-creatures an extraordinary virtue in himself. It was for him the most natural thing in the world. And for this, too, we love him. We love him because he found life a simple thing, as it essentially is; it is we who have made it complex. We love him because he recaptured in a very easy and uncomplex manner the beauty of the world about him, the beauty of unselfishness, the beauty of loving, and the beauty of giving.

We have an expression nowadays: "Give till it hurts." St. Francis would smile at that. For he would never be hurt by giving. He would give not till it hurt, but until he was happy. And he was happy when he had given everything.

That is another reason for which we love Francis—his happiness. He looked upon the world as a place in which to be joyful. He was a poet. In his youth he loved the singing of the troubadours. And he thought life should be song, romance, adventure, joy—a questing for gladness, a gladness which would come from following the rules of the great game of living. St. Francis lived nobly, joyfully. He tried to make all men a great brotherhood. And he did this for the love of God. For all these things, his simplicity, his unselfishness, his love of suffering human beings, his love of God—for all these things we love Francis of Assisi.

Over in Italy, in the little town of Assisi, men and women are celebrating the seven hundredth anniversary of the death of Francis. Pilgrims have come from England, from America, from Spain and Germany and France. The great white monastery on the hill gives greeting as it looks down over the wide-sweeping valley. Hundreds of children dressed in white pass in procession through the little streets, singing sweet songs of praise. It is a glorious tribute of love, very simple, very sincere, and very beautiful. A stranger coming to Assisi might ask, why are these things so? We answer: It is because 700 years ago a youth who had money and dreams of glory and promise of knighthood

and the fair chance of gaining the victory that men easily understand, gave these up to follow a vision that most men find it hard to understand. He caught the vision of the delicate and fragile and precious things in a fine simplicity, and all his life he kept the vision clear. Assisi honors Francis because by the example of his life Francis has helped us all to find the path of glory that leads beyond the grave. And now we, who never saw him—who know him through the chronicle of more than 200,000 yesterdays—just because we love him we sometimes think we remember the slender figure and the dark, sensitive face, as he walked over the hills of Umbria, just as we remember a friend we met this morning and the gladness of his parting smile.

It would be a fine thing to be over there in Assisi today, to share in the glorious romance that captured the valley and the hill 700 years ago. It is the land of a great adventure, it is the country of a saint's knightly deeds, it is the land where dreams come true. But it is also a fine thing to be here in America, and to catch here in our homeland, the spirit of the great St. Francis, the happy troubadour of God, who asked nothing of this world but its poverty, who loved his God as his riches, and who loved his neighbor as himself. His memory is a sweet song echoing down the centuries; its cadences are still clear; its message is still vital; its truth still conquers the world.

The Popes and the Jews

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GOING back as far as the time of Pope Innocent III, in 1198, over 700 years ago, we find that this Pontiff, writing to those who were persecuting the Jews, said:

"They [the Jews] are the living witnesses of the Christian Faith. Christians should not exterminate or oppress them, because they have not lost the knowledge of the Law. As in their synagogue they should not go beyond what the law permits, we should not trouble them in the exercise of the privileges accorded to them. Though they choose to persist in the hardness of their hearts rather than to seek to understand the oracles of the Prophets and the

secrets of the Law, and come to a knowledge of Christ, they have on that account no less right to Our protection. Hence, as they claim Our assistance, We comply with their demand and take them under the aegis of Our protection, in compliance with the gentle spirit of Christian piety, following the footsteps of Our predecessors of happy memory, of Calixtus, of Eugene, of Alexander, of Clement and of Celestin. . . . ”

The Jews themselves also have borne witness to this protection afforded them by the Roman Pontiffs. In 1807 the rabbis and delegates from different synagogues were invited by Napoleon to meet in Paris and establish a great sanhedrim. Whether or not this was the first act of toleration extended by a civil government, they took advantage of the opportunity afforded to pay solemn recognition to the only power that had protected them in previous centuries—the Papacy. In the Department of Public Worship are preserved the proceedings of the session held on February 5, 1807, from which we quote:

“It is in consequence of the sacred principles of morals that in different times the Roman Pontiffs have protected and received into their States the Jews—persecuted and expatriated from different parts of Europe.”

Mention is then made of the kindness received at the hands of Popes St. Gregory, Alexander II, Innocent II, Alexander III, Gregory IX, Clement V, Clement VI, and several other Popes, Bishops and heads of Religious Orders. In conclusion they—

“Resolved: That the expression of these sentiments shall be recorded in the proceedings of this day, that it may ever remain an authentic testimony of the gratitude of the Israelites of the Assembly for the benefits which the generations which have preceded have received from the ecclesiastics of the different countries of Europe.”